

PARENTING SKILLS

BASED ON THE QUR'AN AND SUNNAH
[With Practical Examples for various Ages]

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SELF-SEARCH

The origin of Self-Search in Islam is the concept of *mohasabah*. It is a very important concept in Islam and it comes from the following verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلْتَنْتَرْحَمَنَّ أَنْفُسُ مَا قَدَّمَتْ لِعَدٍ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ
بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

"O you who believe, remain conscious of Allah (have *taqwa*), and let every human being look to what he has sent ahead for the morrow. And once again, remain conscious of Allah (have *taqwa*), for Allah is fully aware of all that you do."⁴

The Prophet SAAW also emphasized that we should always assess and evaluate our actions and deeds. In fact, he labelled the person who does not do this as *ghafel* or *a'jez*, which means careless, complacent, and unable. Shaddad Ibn Awes RAA narrated that the Prophet SAAW said:

الْكَيْسُ مَنْ دَانَ نَفْسَهُ وَعَمِلَ لِمَا بَعْدَ الْمَوْتِ وَالْعَاجِزُ مَنْ أَتْبَعَ نَفْسَهُ هَوَاهَا ثُمَّ مَتَى
عَلَى اللَّهِ

"A wise person is one who blames himself for his shortcomings and works hard for what comes after death, while a careless and complacent person (*ghafel*) or unable person (*a'jez*) is one who follows his whims and desires and keeps hoping for the mercy of Allah."

Omar Ibn al-Khattab RAA used to say:

"حاسبوا أنفسكم قبل أن تحاسبوا، وزنوا أعمالكم قبل أن توزنوا، فإن أهون عليكم في الحساب غدًا أن تحاسبوا أنفسكم اليوم، وتزينوا للعرض الأكبر "يومئذ تعرضون لا تخفى منكم خافية"

"Review, evaluate, and assess yourself before you are assessed. Weigh your deeds before they are weighed against you, and prepare yourself for the day where you will be fully exposed."⁵

Al-Hassan al-Basry RAA used to say:

"المؤمن قوام على نفسه، يحاسب نفسه لله، وإنما خف الحساب يوم القيامة على قوم حاسبوا أنفسهم في الدنيا، وإنما شق الحساب يوم القيامة على قوم أخذوا هذا الأمر من غير محاسبة"

"Believers observe themselves and maintain their good deeds. They always review, assess, and evaluate their status. Those who do this in life will have an easy time on the Day of Judgment. And those who do not, will have a difficult time on the Day of Judgment."

The following is reported in the tablets of Ibraheem:

"ينبغي للعقل ما لم يكن مغلوباً على عقله أن يكون له أربع ساعات ساعة يناجي فيها ربه، وساعة يحاسب فيها نفسه، وساعة يتفكر في صنع الله، وساعة يخلو فيها لحاجته من المطعم والمشرب"

"A wise person should divide her time into four portions; one portion to supplicate to her Lord, a second portion to review, evaluate, and assess herself, the third portion to reflect upon the creation of Allah, and the fourth portion to work and earn her living."⁶

We should remember that one day we will be fully exposed, as Allah SWT says in *Surah al-Haqqah*:

"يَوْمَئِذٍ تُعْرَضُونَ لَا تَخْفَى مِنْكُمْ خَافِيَةٌ"

"On that day, you will be exposed to view, no secret of yours will remain hidden."⁷

Therefore, it is a wise practice for believers to assess and review their actions regularly. Relationships can be enhanced if actions are monitored and changed as soon as faults are discovered. Scholars recommend that a process of *mohasabah* be implemented to help improve and enhance the level of our *taqwa* and closeness to Allah. This process should be done frequently to achieve the best possible results. It requires that parents assess their actions, first as individuals, then together as a couple. They should have a list of questions to ask themselves, maybe at the end of the day or at the end of the week. This list of questions should cover their daily activities with their children, as well as characteristics and behaviour, such as worship and interaction with others. This will help the parents evaluate how good their days are and discover whether they have room for improvement. The following are examples of questions that their list should include:

- Did I perform my daily prayers on time?
- Did I donate money and charity for the sake of Allah?
- Did I think about what I wanted to say before speaking?
- Did I hurt the feelings of my fellow humans in any way?
- Did I express my love and appreciation for my children and family members?
- Did I thank my spouse for his or her efforts in helping me with the children?
- Did I speak nicely about my family members?
- Did I treat my children kindly?
- Did I.... ?

5. Ahmad

6. Ibn Hibban and Hakim

This is just a sample of the questions that all Muslims should ask themselves to evaluate their performance during that specific day or week. If the answers are positive, we should be thankful to Allah SWT. If we realize that there are shortcomings in our performance, we should make a strong commitment to correct our mistakes and perform better in the future.

Parents can do a lot to improve their parenting skills through the Self-Search process. This process helps parents instill certain great qualities in their children that will help them become strong and confident Muslims who can resist the temptations around them. The Self-Search process can also help parents ensure that they themselves have these qualities as well. If parents do not have positive qualities, they will not be able to instill any in their children. Such qualities can only be acquired through hard work that starts with an honest and sincere **SELF-SEARCH**, to make sure that what parents say and do has the proper impact on their children to support and motivate them. It helps children build a strong, balanced personality, have a positive outlook on life, and be confident that they can have not only a positive impact on their surroundings but also a profound one. With such characteristics children will be able to take what is good and leave what is bad, and even influence the society they live in. They can steer it in the right direction by exercising proper moral values for their own well-being and for the well-being of the generations to come.

Parents should follow these six steps to implement the Self-Search process:

SEARCH

EVALUATE

ACKNOWLEDGE

REINFORCE

CHANGE

HANG ON

Search within ourselves and review all the actions and parental behaviours that we use with our children. We must dig deep into our past, thinking back to childhood, and uncover any hidden reasons that might be the source of our parental behaviour. Often, we may be talking to our children in a certain way, and if we stopped to think about it, we would realize that we are doing exactly what our mom or dad used to do with us. The following questionnaire will help us in the **searching** process.

Answer the following questions as best as you can and be honest with yourself.

During my childhood and my teen years:

1. (a) I felt that my parents loved me because they told me verbally and through hugs and kisses.
(b) My parents didn't say that they loved me and/or they did not hug and kiss me, but I could feel their love indirectly at times.
(c) I didn't feel my parents' love and doubted that they loved me at all.
2. (a) I felt that my parents were interested in me and that they took my personal affairs seriously, despite their busy schedules.
(b) I felt that my parents did not pay much attention to my personal affairs. I often felt like my parents did not treat me as if I had a distinct personality from the rest of my siblings.
(c) I didn't get any attention at all from my parents.
3. (a) I felt my parents' encouragement and support and they helped me whenever they could.
(b) I didn't feel my parents' encouragement and support and they didn't help me when they could have
4. (a) I felt my parents' approval and knew that they took my efforts seriously no matter what the results were.
(b) I didn't feel my parents' approval unless I took on more than I could handle to meet their expectations.
(c) I didn't feel my parents' approval no matter what I did.

UNDERSTAND YOUR CHILD

The principle of understanding your child comes from the fact that Islam bases everything on knowledge. The first verse of the Qur'an that was revealed deals with the most important tool of acquiring knowledge:

"اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ"

"Read in the name of your Lord, who has created [human]."¹³

In the first five verses of this revelation, Allah *SWT* uses the words *iqra*, 'allama, and *al-qalam*, which translate into *read*, *taught*, and *pen*, respectively. These are all tools used to acquire knowledge. In addition, all scholars agree that, in order for our acts of worship to be accepted, they must be performed for the right reasons, and based on proper knowledge. For example, when dealing with our children, we must have a thorough understanding of the issue at hand in order to properly and adequately address it with them. If we want to know how to motivate our children to function in a useful and cooperative way, we must have some understanding of the psychological mechanisms involved.

All human actions have a purpose. This applies to both adults and children. The purpose may be known or unknown to us. As parents, knowing this hidden purpose will enable us to help our children behave differently by changing their motives. Two main motives drive the actions of children. These are, the need to belong and the need for attention.